

Fourth Annual Rural Convention

THE stalwart resolution of the Australian farmer is evident in the fact that despite the almost insuperable difficulties of the time, an imposing group of delegates are now in session at "Tay Creggan," Hawthorn, for the Fourth Annual Convention of the National Catholic Rural Movement.

Delegates assembled on Tuesday last for an opening retreat, conducted by the Very Rev. J. S. Meagher, S.J. On Wednesday morning, March 10, High Mass was celebrated at Xavier College, Kew, when a feature of the Rural Convention Mass was the observance of the ancient custom of the Offertory Procession, in which gifts representing the products produced by the movement, were offered at the altar. Rev. J. McInerney (Ballarat), preached the occasional sermon. Bishop Henschke presided.

OFFICIAL OPENING

After the Mass delegates journeyed to "Tay Creggan," the Grail headquarters, at Yarra-street, Hawthorn, where the Convention was officially opened by his Lordship the Bishop of Wagga Wagga, N.S.W., Most Rev. F. A. Henschke, D.D., Episcopal Chairman of the N.C.R.M., who delivered the presidential report.

Throughout the day, as throughout each day of the convention, a comprehensive agenda occupied delegates. Features of Wednesday's activity included the national secretary's report on the Enquiry on Rural Debt, a session on N.C.R.M. song by Rev. Dr. P. Jones, a broadcast from 3LO by the national secretary on the convention, an address on "Young Farmers' Clubs," by Rev. B. W. Hayden (Howlong, N.S.W.), and the showing of a film, "All That Money Can Buy."

To-day, Thursday, Mass was celebrated at St. Augustine's, Bourke-street, and among the talks listed are those on "Co-operation and the N.C.R.M.," by J. M. Gollasch (Lockhart, N.S.W.); "Credit Unions," debate by N. Vowles (Spalding) and T. Hanrahan (Bungaree); "Finance on the Farm," A. H. Gibson (State Savings Bank), and the "Plan of Land Settlement Decided on for South Australia," Rev. L. Roberts (Adelaide).

The programme for to-morrow, Friday, includes a talk on "War Agricultural Committees," F. Murphy (Department of Commerce), "Group Action for 1943," B. A. Santamaria; "Regionalism," Professor Andrews (University of Sydney), and the final session, at which Bishop Henschke will preside, and addresses will be delivered by D. G. M. Jackson, M.A.; B. A. Santamaria, and his Grace the Archbishop, Most Rev. D. Mannix.

WOMEN'S SECTION

The women's section commenced with a retreat on Tuesday conducted by Very Rev. W. P. Hackett, S.J. Besides following in the main the programme arranged for the men, delegates' special talks include: "Religious Life," Miss K. O'Halloran (Drysdale); "Family Life," Mrs. J. Gartner (Glenroy); "Community Life," Mrs. Scanlon (Romsey); "The N.C.R.M. and the Mothercraft Work of the Grey Sisters," by a Grey Sister; "The N.C.R.M. Ideal of the Rural Home," Mrs. N. Kennedy (Mt. Gambier); "The Women's Land Army," Rev. J.

Catholic Farmers Meet at "Tay Creggan"

Clearly; "Fire on the Earth," N. Minogue.

A special session for the clergy includes papers by Most Rev. Dr. Henschke, Rev. J. McInerney, Rev. B. W. Hayden, Very Rev. J. S. Meagher, S.J.; Rev. M. Gaffney and Rev. J. Cleary.

BISHOP HENSCHKE'S REPORT

The report presented to the third national convention in 1942 disclosed that the main feature of the year 1941 had been the rapid growth of the movement from a few Rural Groups mainly concentrated in the south of Victoria to all the eastern States of the Commonwealth, and to South Australia. Only in Western Australia could the movement expand into new territory. There were certainly vast gaps to be filled in all the States in which the movement had been founded; whole dioceses in which the movement was not established. The year 1942 was, therefore, one of consolidation, the strengthening of sections which had been established and the spreading of them from district to district.

The year 1942 fulfilled expectations. At the beginning of 1941 there were approximately fifty rural groups at varying stages of effectiveness. At the beginning of 1942 this number was raised to 110. But the military call-up took many best men, and in some districts, it was impossible to make up their numbers. By the middle of the year the 110 groups had fallen to about 85. The series of diocesan conferences, however, made good all losses, replacing them with groups which have since proved stronger and more permanent. The total number of groups operating at the moment is 160 among the men, and 15 among the women.

Three Campaigns

The work prescribed for the movement for 1942 was a series of three campaigns and a number of activities which would be proceeding at the same time as the campaigns. The strength of the movement can best be gauged by an examination of the response to both sections of the programme.

The campaigns decided upon were the first stage of the national enquiry on rural debt, the campaign for the plan of co-operative insurance and the land settlement campaign. During the year it became essential to add yet another programme, entitled "Man-power on the Land," which became necessary with the appointment of the war agricultural committees.

Debt Enquiry

The debt enquiry was carried out with energy and success by a number of groups. To date, approximately 600 questionnaires have been returned, and they are still coming in. Since the campaign will continue for another two years, it is anticipated that a satisfactory return will be made. The aim should be not less than 3000.

The response of the groups to the debt enquiry was typical. One-third of the groups gave excellent service; another third performed work of average standard; in the case of the final third of affiliated groups there was nothing done.

A number of groups did not

play their part because they thought the national enquiry would come to nothing; that people would not fill in the questionnaires; that it did not matter whether they threw all their energies into the campaign since



MOST REV. F. A. HENSCHKE, Bishop of Wagga Wagga, Episcopal Chairman of N.C.R.M.

other groups were doing their part. As it was, all the predictions of the critics were founded by the fact that wherever the group did throw all its energy into the campaign, the mass of farmers in the district did give it support. To obtain this support groups had to work hard. Public opinion had to be created, often against seem-

ingly insuperable odds. But it was created, and the return which resulted showed that this most difficult campaign which the movement could ever be called upon to conduct could be crowned with success if the group members would put the work of the movement first.

Co-operative Insurance

The co-operative insurance campaign was crowned with success. Before the movement could make definite arrangements with any particular company it had to give an accurate idea of the amount of business which could be obtained within a definite time. Groups co-operated splendidly in issuing the first application forms. More than 500 farmers promised to put their insurance through the co-operative agency when it was established by the movement, and the total amount of premiums involved came to £2500. This was a really splendid result.

The final agreement made with the General Accident Insurance Co. Ltd. was the best offering. The farmer will receive an average of 15 per cent. on his premium, while the movement will receive a graduated commission which will amount to 25 per cent. when the premiums total over £1000. Already, more than 100 applications for policies have been received, and the smooth working of the organisation to date augurs well for the future.

War Agricultural Committees

The setting up of the war agricultural committees was the occasion for the inclusion of the emergency campaign which concluded the year's activities, "Man-power on the Land." The response of the groups to this difficult campaign was, in many

(Continued on page 14.)

EDUCATION ISSUE IN BRITAIN

Government Does Not Intend to Abolish Denominational Schools

It was revealed recently that our London correspondent, that the British Government does not intend arbitration to abolish denominational schools.

Speaking to Glamorgan Education Committee, Sir William Jenkins, M.P., its chairman, said he had received from Mr. R. A. Butler, president of the Board of Education, a letter in which the president declared that he wanted to perpetuate the dual system, he was trying to modify it.

Mr. Butler, stated Sir William, wanted to get an agreement in which he would be in a position to say that if non-provided schools could be set up within a period of years, up new schools and improve their present schools, he would get grants from the Board. If they did not do so within a limited period, as laid down in the Act of 1904, responsibility fell on the local authorities.

Strong opposition to T.U.C.'s education policy still being expressed in various parts of the country, Mr. George Chester, who, as chairman of the T.U.C. education committee, was primarily responsible for the proposals to abolish church-schools, came under heavy fire when he addressed a meeting in Northampton. His speech was followed by shouts of "Dictatorship!" and "what about the rights of minorities?" and a sweeping statement that "good number" of Catholics and "the majority" of Church of England schools had been condemned was challenged.

National Enquiry Into Rural Debt

N.C.R.M.'s

PRACTICAL

SUCCESS

average only 44.7% and 59.3% of returns from two of the questionnaires which were sent out.

The policy of the movement in 1943 with regard to the questionnaires was twofold:

- (1) An intensification of effort during the first campaign for the year in those districts which have already been covered to ensure as far as possible that those who have not yet replied do so.
- (2) The spread of the questionnaire to the new districts in which the movement is organised.

Three Lines of Action

While the distribution of questionnaires had been going on, the movement has undertaken three lines of action which, when fully developed will, with the questionnaires, give the complete picture of Rural Debt.

In the first place, an investigation is being conducted into the whole mass of material on agricultural questions, comprising Government documents, reports of Royal Commissions, bank reports, finding of select committees and so on, which are lying in our public libraries, but of which no synopsis has been made. This is an invaluable storehouse of material on the vital question which is being investigated, and it is expected that by the middle of 1944, there will be available to the movement an immense amount of original and secondary material:

- (1) An estimate of the total amount of rural indebtedness existing in Australia at the moment.
- (2) A general survey of the causes of rural debt in the main sectors of primary production.
- (3) A statement as to whether the debt problem as it now exists is likely to be solved by normal economic fluctuations.

The second line of development has been the contacting Government departments in every State in the hope that from Debt Adjustment Board, Lands and Agricultural Departments and similar bodies, the N.C.R.M. would be able to obtain a picture of the debt position as it affected each State. On the whole, no satisfactory result has been obtained. The State of New South Wales has offered its full collaboration. The other States do not seem to possess any complete records which would assist the movement in its enquiry.

Survey

The third method, and which will concern groups in the coming year, is the District Review of the Debt Position, a method pioneered in the Murrumbidgee and Redcliffs districts in the groups in that area, and, particularly, by their chaplain, Rev. Fr. Linane. Fr. Linane, the groups of which he was chaplain, set out to supplement the information contained in the questionnaires by a complete view of the economic factors which operated in the district since its opening up for settlement. The history of the district, the nature of its production, the history of its land value fluctuations in the costs and price of its products, the variation in the size of holdings, the history of evictions, the reasons why settlers had tended to leave the district, an estimate of the present financial position of the district as a whole—these features were all included in a report on the Sunraysia district which was a model of its kind.

The proposal for this year's section of the National Enquiry is that this district survey should be undertaken by every group. Through their handling of the "Man-power on the Land" campaign, the majority of groups already have sufficient experience of district surveys, and the movement is, therefore, entitled to expect the return of fund of material which will provide a complete cross-section of the position of all kinds of districts in Australia.

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The result of the campaign was generally satisfactory. Approximately 600 questionnaires had been returned. Yet, obviously, many more would have to be distributed and returned and many more districts would have to be covered.

It may be thought, continued Mr. Santamaria, that to obtain 600 questionnaires out of a total of 2000 distributed was not a very high figure. However, it compared relatively favourably with the similar investigation carried out by the Royal Commission on the Wheat Industry, the report of which was published in 1934-5. With all the machinery at the disposal of the Royal Commission it was able to